The Reptoid Hypothesis: Utopian and Dystopian Representational Motifs in David Icke's Alien Conspiracy Theory[1]

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I am the lizard king, I can do anything.

Jim Morrison, "Celebration of the Lizard"

Alien reptilian invasions, blood-sucking, pedophilic Illuminati agents acting as totalitarian world leaders, trans-dimensional alien-humans interbreeding to support a program of cosmic imperialism on an unimaginable scale—no, this is not an *X-Files* episode, neither is it an undiscovered Philip K. Dick or H.P. Lovecraft novel, nor is it the latest Hollywood science fiction spectacle. Rather, it is the real-life and ever-evolving conspiracy theory of the self-proclaimed "most controversial speaker and author in the world," David Icke. Icke, one-time British soccer star turned BBC sports personality turned UK Green Party spokesman, is now today's most (in)famous proponent of what we are calling the "Reptoid Hypothesis"—the idea that alien lizards conspiratorially control the Earth and with it human destiny. Inasmuch as the reptoid, a figure of radical difference—what we have termed "UFOtherness"—also takes on decidedly animal overtones, we will seek in this paper to examine how Icke's narrative stands today as representative evidence of a popular dystopianism that projects onto the animal (as cause) the sum total of the fear and discontent that have arisen around contemporary issues such as global imperialism and transnational capitalism. Yet, a closer investigation of Icke's theory also suggests that utopian

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readings of his work are possible in which it is theorized that the end to global domination can be arrived at only via the formation of new human/reptoid alliances toward peace. In this paper we will attempt to unravel these various layers of ambiguity, arguing that Icke's theory simultaneously represents a progressive desire for the construction of a holistic animal/human future and a reactionary attitude that is unable (or unwilling) to overcome the fetters of capitalist spectacle and conservative conceptualizations of liberal-humanist subjectivity.

While those unfamiliar with Icke and reptoid discourses may wonder if this is a discussion worthy of the non-lunatic, we want to caution against relegating Icke's work to merely fringe status. Rather, Icke is representative of a major counter-cultural trend that is indeed global in proportions. For instance, Icke's web page purportedly received over 600,000 hits in its first year alone, and for over four years he has been invited to lecture in at least 25 countries (Cowley). Icke's most recognized publication—the massive 533-page Rosetta stone for conspiracy junkies, *The Biggest Secret*—has already gone through six re-printings since its release date in 1999, and his latest conspiracy/ufology testament, *Alice in Wonderland and the World Trade Center Disaster*, passes for vogue amongst American, British, and Canadian audiences as well as in non-Anglo international cultural arenas such as South Africa (where the book has been an enduring Top 5 seller). The demographic breakdown of his audience is, in and of itself, an interesting phenomenon. Icke appeals equally to bohemian hipsters and right-wing reactionary fanatics. As regards the latter, in England the British Nazi Group Combat 18 supports his writings, and in America the ultra right-wing conservative group Christian Patriots often attends his lectures (Taylor; Crumey). But they are just as likely to be sitting next to a 60-something UFO buff, a Nuwaubian, a Posadist, a Raëlian, or New Age earth goddess.[2] Thus, Icke has an expansive popular appeal that cuts across political, economic, and religious divides, uniting a wide spectrum of left and right groups and individuals under his prolific and all-embracing meta-conspiracy theory.

Icke's rise to international fame is not in and of itself an anomaly. In fact, his theory is part of a larger alien conspiracy culture that began its ascendancy as a post-WWII Cold War phenomenon (Jung, *Flying Saucers*;

Peebles), and with the recent success of *X-Files*, asserted itself as a popular aspect of a global media culture (Pritchard et al.; Kellner, *Media Spectacle* 126). Following an alleged crash of a UFO craft in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947, a new genus of so-called "contactee" literature sprang up, and newspaper reports thrilled to the idea that aliens filled the skies (Dean 40). While many associated the alien invasion with the Communist threat (Mars the red planet equaling the Soviet Red Army), those in contact with the aliens reported differently, finding instead that the aliens were in fact here to help humankind survive global crises like world war and nuclear weapons (Clark 133–35). However, by the 1970s, with scandals such as Watergate and the Vietnam War suggesting to an increasingly paranoid public that governments can act in defense of their own powerful and secret interests, numerous reports of alien abduction made it clear that intruding aliens might very well have their own (potentially harmful) agenda as well (Keel 290). While television shows such as *Star Trek*, *Outer Limits*, and *The Twilight Zone*, and films such as *Star Wars*, *Alien*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, all helped to cement the connection between aliens, politics, and entertainment in the popular imagination of the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s continued the alien craze with the creation of a new set of narratives that began to combine alien themes with conspiratorial ideas. The year 1982 brought *The Thing*, which—like 1979's *Alien*—suggested the analogy to political conspiracy through its portrayal of an alien life form that infects and gestates within its human hosts; and in 1983, the GenX television miniseries *V* offered a compelling, literal version of the Reptoid Hypothesis for Reagan's "trickle down" America, with imperialist reptiles plotting the take-over of the top 50 world capitals. *V* was quickly followed in 1985 by the immensely popular *Enemy Mine*, a movie in which all-American fighter pilot Dennis Quaid first hates and then learns to love his Draconian lizard counterpart Louis Gossett, Jr.; and in 1988, *They Live* dramatized how a new optic (literally: sun glasses) could help a human resistance movement to perceive that freedom was a lie created by a highly managerialized society run solely for alien domination and exploitation. Meanwhile, Whitley Strieber arguably inaugurated contemporary alien fandom in literature with a series of books detailing his own abduction story, and in 1989 Strieber's best

selling "autobiographical" novel *Communion* was also made into a Hollywood movie.

With alien conspiracy already at a fever pitch, the rise of a potential New World Order on the socio-political stage in the 1990s appeared only to intensify such thoughts in the public's imagination. Hollywood released a steady stream of blockbuster movies that focused on the topic, with *Fire in the Sky* (1993), *Independence Day* (1996), *Men in Black* (1997), *Contact* (1997), *Alien Resurrection* (1997) and *The Faculty* (1998) as just some of the films that sparked the collective alien craze during the decade. On TV, unprecedented audiences tuned in to watch the series *Dark Skies* (1996–1997), and the widely popular, award-winning, extremely ambitious television opus *X-Files* (1993–2002). This is not even to mention the innumerable alien-themed pseudo-documentaries—including the now debunked alien autopsy—that were broadcast on stations ranging from Fox to the Discovery Channel. On the radio, 15 million listeners were tuning in every night to listen to alien abductees, ufologists, and crop-circle conspiracy theorists on Art Bell's *Coast to Coast* AM program. While aliens flourished on the big screen, small screen, and radio, the evolving Internet in fact became the most significant arena for cultivating and expanding alien conspiracy subcultures. Scattered throughout the Net, an unfathomable number of alien conspiracy sites arose, including UFOU: Earth's First UFO University <http://www.ufou-visiblecollege.com/>, the Alien Press <http://www.alienpress.com/>, and of course, Icke's own <http://www.davidicke.com/>.

All told, then, as Robert Goldberg has aptly stated, the alien icon "truly became the smiley face of the 1990's" (223). Jodi Dean likewise has characterized millennial America as an "alien nation" (179), and Mark Dery has written of this alien fever as "a manifestation of the postmodern zeitgeist" (13). Thus, while our intention here is to explore the particulars concerning the utopian and dystopian potentials of Icke's Reptoid Hypothesis and not the intricate varieties of the myriad competing visions of alien life and conspiratorial intrigue that now exist worldwide, we want to make clear that our interest in Icke is primarily in interpreting his work as an iconic representation of a ubiquitous global exoculture.[3] Dery argues that alien conspiracy theories are "at once a symptom of millennial angst and a

home remedy for it" (12). It is our belief that the current exoculture can be read as a social symptom of the "tempestuous period of transition and metamorphosis" that is best characterized as a "postmodern adventure" (Best and Kellner 5–11); and we hope to illuminate some of the ways in which the figures of global conspiracy and the alien—*qua* reptile (i.e., animal)—signify important contemporary hopes and fears about alterity and animals generally. Thus, utilizing critical theorist Douglas Kellner's method of "diagnostic critique," this paper "uses history to read texts and texts to read history," with the end goal of grasping contemporary "utopian yearnings" about the future so that progressives will be challenged "to develop representations, political alternatives, and practices and movements which address these predispositions" (*Media Culture* 116–17).

In other words, we feel that a diagnostic critique of a newly emergent global phenomenon such as David Icke is itself part of a larger utopian project—a project that utilizes theory to illuminate both the positive and negative aspects of contemporary culture. We believe that utopia inheres itself as a desire within popular culture (Bloch) and, following Herbert Marcuse, we think that all culture—be it mainstream or fringe—presents itself as an "objective ambiguity" (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* 225). Thus it is a utopian task to radicalize this ambiguity through the application of new theories and practices so that oppressive cultural features are negated even as progressive tendencies within everyday life are articulated and re-affirmed. Utopianism, then, in this respect, is neither simply a fictional nowhere nor an explicit blueprint for how to plan an ideal polity (Davis), but rather something that is immediately present and yet ideologically, normatively, or otherwise blocked from achieving its full realization in its service to society (Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation* 13; Moylan 1–2).[4] In sum, as utopian archeologists, we will have to, at times, read Icke against himself in order to excavate the utopian impulse that lies buried deep within the ideologically reactionary sediment of the Reptoid Hypothesis.

In speaking about utopias, Terry Eagleton has remarked that the function of utopia is to make us reflect on the contradictions of current society. We agree that utopian work involves itself in a critical understanding of the present (Kumar 87–88), and while we will remark later on how the narrative device of critical (Kumar) or cognitive (Suvin) estrangement in

Icke may in fact serve the ends of reflective social critique, Eagleton is incorrect in downplaying the future-orientation involved in the utopianism that concerns us here. In our understanding, such utopianism is a process (Bammer) that encourages a creative change in paradigm and perspective (Sargisson, *Utopian Bodies*) such that a "critical" mass (Moylan) can be achieved. More so, a utopianism like Icke's is primarily transgressive at the level of form and content, while emphasizing a transformative function (Sargisson, *Utopian Bodies* 1–12). We believe that David Icke's work is probably best understood as a quintessentially dystopian literature concerned with providing pathways towards a less repressive future. As Lyman Tower Sargent has shown, such dystopianism is best characterized as enacting the three modes of "map, warn, and hope" (7–9), a schema which we also believe, in many respects, mirrors our own project here. Thus in order to map the utopian and dystopian elements within Icke's project, this paper will focus on three dominant themes within his work: conspiracy theory as cognitive mapping; media spectacle as a contested terrain of capitalist complacency and opposition; and posthuman critiques of the liberal humanist tradition.

The Tale behind the Tail: Towards a Reptoid History

> The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.
>
> *As You Like It*, 5.1.30–31

Before we begin to explore the utopian relationship that we believe exists between alien- conspiracy theory, such as Icke's Reptoid Hypothesis, and the postmodern imagination, it is important to chart David Icke's overarching project.[5] Icke's greatest strength is not so much as an innovator of any particular strain of alien or conspiracy theory but rather in his totalizing ambition to weave numerous sub-theories into an extraordinary narrative that is both all-inclusive and all-accounting. Much of his writing on aliens reveals an homage to the "ancient astronomer" literature—founded by the controversial cuneiform translator Zecharia Sitchin—that finds in the text of the oldest extant creation story, the Mesopotamian Enuma Elish,

reasons for suspecting that extraterrestrial beings created humanity as a sort of primordial biotechnology experiment. According to both Sitchin and Icke, rather than having evolved on their own according to Darwinian natural selection, humans are in fact the result of a genetic experiment carried out by a race of reptilian aliens called Anunnaki (Icke, *Biggest Secret* 1–17). In short, it is claimed that the Anunnaki produced humans as a slave race by inter-splicing their genetic material with that of Homo Erectus (*Biggest Secret* 7). While Icke draws upon Sitchin's "ancient astronomer" theory, he develops it in favor of his own New Age and conspiratorial agenda. Whereas Sitchin had hypothesized that the Anunnaki of the 12th planet came to Earth in order to mine its rich mineral base of gold and other precious metals (Sitchin 22), Icke believes that the Anunnaki reptoids desired to mine mono-atomic gold (*Biggest Secret* 30–38). This mineral supposedly has the ability to increase the carrying capacity of the nervous system by ten thousand times and so, when ingested, the Anunnaki would be able to process vast amounts of information and accelerate trans-dimensional travel. Icke also postulates that the Anunnaki live off human fear and anxiety. They are, in a sense, emotional vampires.[6] Down though the ages, Icke believes, such Anunnaki have initiated numerous blood rituals and human sacrifices. During these rituals, human victims release large amounts of negative energy, which is then absorbed by Anunnaki waiting in the fourth dimension, their preferred stomping ground. To quote Icke: "Thus we have the encouragement of wars, human genocide, the mass slaughter of animals, sexual perversions which create highly charged negative energy, and black magic ritual and sacrifice which takes place on a scale that will stagger those who have not studied the subject" (*Biggest Secret* 40).

With a satisfactory labor force accounted for, then, Icke claims that the Annunaki still faced the problem of who would rule on Earth as overseers of their human slaves. Thus, Icke imagines that the Anunnaki interbred with another alien race to produce earthling slave masters. Icke refers to these other extraterrestrials as the "Nordics" because of their blond hair and blue eyes. The resulting "super-hybrids" are none other than the Aryans (Icke, *Children of the Matrix* 251). This strain of alien hybrids retains many of the central reptoid traits, including "top-down control, emotionless 'cold-blooded' attitudes, an obsession with ritualistic behavior, and so on"

(*Children* 275). This reptilian state of consciousness characteristic of the Aryans is, for Icke, a "lower level of development" in spiritual evolution, and is directly related to fascist militarism, technocratic rationalism, and racism (*Children* 19, 251). Because of their close ties to the original Anunnaki, the Aryans can also shape-shift (transform themselves back and forth between human and animal bodies) and some can even control weaker, human minds.

Mirroring a number of claims made by the political far-right, Icke asserts a standard conspiracy-culture line that the pure Aryan bloodline has ruled the planet throughout history, though he is unique in developing it in an exocultural direction. In Icke's mind, Aryan lizards have been Sumerian kings, Egyptian pharaohs, and, in more recent history, American presidents and British prime ministers. According to Icke, 43 American presidents, including George Washington and George W. Bush, are direct reptoid-lineage descendants, and the Queen Mother herself was "seriously reptilian" (*Children* 79). In fact, it is at this point that much of Icke's work has its most enduring interest, by providing historical critique that is at once trenchant political analysis mixed with what reads like an over-the-top satire in the tradition of Jonathan Swift.[7] In this respect, Icke's work includes any number of accountings of how world leaders and other famous personalities, in order to satiate their reptilian bloodlust, take part in ritualistic sacrifices and pedophilic activities that include kidnapping, hedonistic drug parties, and brutal murder. Icke himself theorizes that such obscene acts as these typify the difference between alien-kind and humanity and that they are necessary else the Aryan-reptilians lose their temporary human form and revert to their original reptoid physiognomy. Again following the prevailing exocultural explanation, Icke claims that in order to maintain their position of world domination down through the centuries, the Aryan lizards have created a secret society known as the Freemasons or Illuminati. The Illuminati are the grand historical puppet masters, presiding over all human activities through indirect channels of control and manipulation. From the innermost secretive "Round Table," a handful of reptilian masterminds directs the course of human events via a network of international organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, The Trilateral Commission, The Bilderberg Group, the IMF, World Bank, and

the United Nations (*Children* 339). The plan is quite simply "to complete their financial control of the human race" (*Children* 345).

In order to maintain their anonymity and deflect attention away from their ubiquitous presence in international finance and politics, Icke believes that the Illuminati are very interested in mind control. The media and the Internet are two powerful tools that they have developed to achieve mind control over the general populace. In Icke's conspiratorial schema, "The media, in turn, get their 'news' and 'information' overwhelmingly from official sources, which, like the media itself, are owned by the reptilian bloodline" (*Children* 260). Commenting on the Internet conspiracy, Icke writes, "The Internet is an Illuminati creation and only exists because of military technology. . . . [I]t allows for the easiest possible surveillance of personal communications through e-mails, and the websites visited by individuals give the authorities the opportunity to build a personality and knowledge profile of everyone. It's about control" (*Children* 415). The Internet, then, is just another step towards perfect surveillance of the human race. The "most important goal of the Illuminati is," according to Icke, "a micro-chipped population" (*Children* 368). Once a microchip is inserted into the human body, each individual will be tracked using a global positioning satellite. Thus in the twenty-first century the reptoids have gone digital, inventing and deploying new information technologies that will further suppress the truth, expand the scope of surveillance, and restrict individual freedoms.

So what can humans do to liberate themselves from the tyranny of our shared oppressors? Icke ends each of his books with a kind of spiritual program for emancipation that can often be found in all manner of New Age communities. As opposed to the rational discourse of science, which is a "fascist club," Icke suggests that we realize and manifest multiple, overlapping realities in our lives. These multiple, even contradictory, interpretations of the real are not simply misunderstandings but the results of our differing positions within an overall energy field. Thus, each narrative of reality is in fact united on a deeper level by our "multi-dimensional infinity" (*Children* 406) or "vibrational wholeness" (*Children* 399). Rather than subjectively fragmented and biologically finite beings lost in a sea of "cosmic accidents," Icke asserts that we are all part of a unifying, trans-

dimensional force: love. This force unifies all life in the galaxy. In fact, Icke argues, "We are the reptilians and the 'demons' and, at the same time, we are those they manipulate because we are all the same 'I'" (*Children* 424). In the end, therefore, it is not clear whether Icke is in fact suggesting that reptoids are simply psychic projections and that his numerous treatises are little more than an elaborate allegory or if he actually believes that reptoids do literally exist outside the human imagination. Things get even more complicated when he states, "If the reptilians and other astral manipulators did not exist, we would have to invent them. In fact we probably have. They are other levels of ourselves putting ourselves in our face" (*Children* 423). Whatever the case may be, Icke is clear that liberation consists of understanding that humans and reptoids are ultimately one within a unified energy field, and that we must learn to love the abject, horrific, and demonic "other" as part of our own humanity. Thus, his latest work ends by declaring that his future work will no longer take on the air of conspiratorial critique, but rather present solely a positive vision of multi-dimensional love (*Alice* 479–86).

Mapping the Postmodern Times: Icke as Intergalactic Cartographer of Society and the Self

> The only difference between myself and a madman, is that I am not mad.
>
> Salvador Dali, *Diary of a Genius*, May 1952

In an imaginative attempt to manage the disorienting complexities of present age "virtuality," the rise of a global media culture, the explosion of new information and bio-technologies, and the seemingly infinite expansions of transnational capital, conspiracy theory is—as Fredric Jameson has argued—a populist form of cognitive mapping that attempts to represent the un-representable totality of these seemingly disparate yet interconnected social, political, and economic transformations (*Geopolitical Aesthetic*). Expanding upon Jameson's theory, Douglas Kellner argues that contemporary alien conspiracy theories represent a form of "pop-postmodernism" that constructs new modes of representation suitable to the uncertainty, (dis)organization, and fragmentation that often characterize the cultural logic

of the present age (Kellner, *Media Spectacle* 156) While Jameson argues that most conspiracy theories are in fact "degraded" or ideologically mired products of an information underclass, such cartographic attempts to trace the topography of the postmodern landscape are essential to a political project. Because postmodern society is often bewildering and disorienting, it can, for Jameson, lead to political paralysis and nihilistic confusion. Thus, in order to regain a sense of political agency, an "as yet unimaginable new mode" of representation must be constructed with the ability "to grasp our positioning as individuals and collective subjects [within the space of transnational capital] and regain a capacity to act and struggle" (*Postmodernism* 54).

Icke's massive conspiracy project is an attempt to imagine an aesthetic capable of mapping the intersections between postmodern culture, capitalism, and transdimensional space. His theory is a significant condensation of all conspiracy theories into one colossal narrative that, for Icke, holds seemingly unlimited explanatory powers. There is an almost obsessive-compulsive desire in Icke's writing to ferret out the connections, produce narratives, and string together detailed minutiae to support his thesis. His archeological method is equally characterized by intricately molded and subtle analyses of historical artifacts and by disorganized, at times baffling, bricolage that allows him to intellectually pole vault from ancient Sumer to contemporary America in a single—and yes, spectacular—bound that defies the laws of academic gravity.

Postmodern paranoia fuels this bewildering archival methodology. In his book *Media Spectacle*, Douglas Kellner makes the distinction between a reactionary "clinical paranoia" a mindset that has dissociated itself from a reality principle and retreated into a persecutorial world of occult fantasy—and a much-needed, progressive "critical paranoia" that is suspicious and inquiring of the politics of media culture (140). To the degree that one interprets Icke's cognitive map literally, it would be classified as clinically paranoid and thus symptomatically dystopian. And yet Icke's analyses of events like the dubious media portrayals surrounding the Gulf War and 9/11 and his overall critique of our growing hi-tech surveillance society would appear to qualify as "critical paranoia" as well. Icke's framework is, therefore, ambiguous and contains both progressive and reactionary

elements Yet, we would argue that Kellner's positive conception of paranoia must be read so as to include the type of novel syntheses and imaginative perceptions that characterize Salvador Dali's technique of "paranoiac-critical" activity. In Best and Kellner's own discussion of the paranoid imagination at work in the literature of Thomas Pynchon, they have written of a "creative paranoia" (27, 55) that we believe is much akin to the sense given by Dali. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Ernst Bloch, the progenitor of contemporary utopian theory, argues that paranoia "reacts to the traditional powers with querulousness and persecution mania, but breaks them at the same time with adventurous inventions, social recipes, heavenly roads and more besides" (93). Consequently, it appears to us that Icke's conspiratorial cognitive mapping could be analyzed as a form of pop-Pynchonism that is not dissociated from a reality principle so much as it is working to produce an entirely new one. It is thus important to recognize how Icke's work attempts to cobble together a matrix of meanings that unites our fragmented perspectives and provides intergalactic guideposts for navigation through space, even as it remains essentially open to the fact that this space may be curved and endlessly expanding. This postmodern metanarrative—if there can be such a thing—contains within it a utopian desire to reconfigure meaning within a discombobulated world where linearity, rationality, and causality have fallen into a postmodern black hole leaving citizens to fend for themselves in an often perplexing cacophony of media simulations, cultural implosions, and political fluctuations. Rather than Jameson's dismissive categorization of conspiracy theory, we see such narratives, when read as imaginary allusions/illusions to material relations, as constructing novel and evolving networks of signifying chains that can in fact contain within them a potentially empowering form of political agency. Thus as Jodi Dean posits, "the distortions and imaginative leaps of conspiracy theory may be helpful tools for coding politics in virtual realities of the techno-global information age" (144).

Yet, the grand scale of Icke's narrative, its drama, and its pop-cultural sci fi appeal, not to mention the cult of celebrity that has blossomed around Icke himself, problematically associate his conspiracy theory with capitalist media spectacle.[8] Guy Debord pejoratively referred to such spectacle as "the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false

consciousness" (139) thus linking up spectacle with the pessimistic evaluation leveled against the culture industry by critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno. Connecting spectacle with the cultural logic of techno-capitalism, Douglas Kellner further argues that Debord's analysis of spectacle is more pertinent now in the "media-ted" information age than ever before (*Media Spectacle*). In Icke's case, he is certainly drawing upon other popular media spectacles like the *X-Files* and *The Matrix* in order to widen his audience and piggyback on their financial success. The sensational overabundance, intensity, and gratuitous hyperrealism of commercial spectacle are all important elements of Icke's aesthetic. Therefore, it is unclear whether Icke successfully manages to valorize particular consumer products (e.g.; films and books that center on ideas of conspiracy and alien domination) while delivering a crippling assessment of the larger culture industry that is in many respects responsible for them.

Even though spectacle is part of the consumer ideology of contemporary capitalism, Icke does manage to find a utopian kernel buried beneath its Teflon outer shell. A radical form of identity politics that could be described as "extraterrestrial subjectivity" (Dean 138) emerges from Icke's dystopian conspiratorial map and his indulgence in over-the-top celebrity. To this end, by rigidifying and commodifying it he rejects the idea that capitalism serves as a final limit or ground to contemporary subjectivity, and thus he presents his readers with a new configuration of the self predicated upon spiritual notions of "vibrational wholeness" or "multi-dimensional infinity" (*Alice* 456). There is a utopian longing in Icke, then, for the reconstruction of individualism and community outside of the current ideological confines of the present age. Loosed from the constraints of historically conditioned determinates such as class, gender, and race, differences flourish in Icke's imagination. His utopian vision of quirky oddities and idiosyncrasies living together in harmony is well summarized in the following quote: "We must let go of the fear of what other people think of us and start living and expressing our own uniqueness of lifestyle, view, and reality. When we do this we step out of the herd and if enough of us do it, there is no herd. . . . We allow everyone else the freedom and respect to express their uniqueness without the fear of ridicule and condemnation. . . . No one seeks to impose their beliefs or reality on anyone

else, so always respecting the freedom of others to make different choices" (*Children* 426).

Within an Ickean utopia of trans-cosmic diversity, oppressive ideologies buttressed by mainstream, commodified, and normalized self-images will be unable to restrain burgeoning permutations of existence from expressing themselves in increasingly multiple and hybridized formations. According to Icke, these re-productions of selfhood, in tune with a vibrational wholeness above and beyond the cultural and political status quo, will no longer be judged as deviant or abnormal but rather simply as concrete expressions of our collective awareness of an ever-present universalizing strong force: love. Clearly, this is a world well beyond Marx's perception of oppressive class structures and Foucault's revelations concerning disciplinary power. This Ickean utopia might be considered as an example of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have written of as a "deterritorialized zone," a place of pure libidinal production that unleashes the primal forces of desire and life (*Anti-Oedipus* 319–22). Icke's imaginative utopian vision receives its best political reading as a form of populist articulation of a Deleuze and Guattarian nomadism, wherein the schizo-subject becomes liberated through its self-involvement with an endless creative process that effects new valences of difference (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 381–84). As Icke states, each individual is in fact "many people" (*Children* 423), and this internal multiplicity is accomplished—as with Guattari's concept of "heterogenesis" (Guattari 69)—through the pulverization of the centered, unified, Oedipalized ego, a process by which the contradiction between the libertarian self and its relationship to the larger community begins to disappear. Indirectly, there is reason not to dismiss Icke when he asserts that in his utopia of free-thinkers and actors "we are all one," united across differences by love itself—love of our collective joy in the very production of singular novelty (*Children* 423).

Therefore, while it is true that Icke's conspiracy theory is sensationalistic, not above capitalistic opportunism, and lacking in a complex critique of subjectivity, it could also be argued that he is exploring the more emancipatory aspects of a postmodern subjectivity and contemporary cultural spectacle. In our own dialectical approach to socio-political spectacle, we want to argue that transgressive popular theories such as Icke's

may also exploit the utopian possibilities inherent in capitalism and media culture themselves in order to quickly reach a global audience that would otherwise remain unaffected by the sphere of revolutionary political/cultural action and avant-garde countercultural ideals. In other words, despite the many reactionary or unsophisticated ways in which Icke's Reptoid Hypothesis signifies only the ideological constraints imposed by capitalist life, the very excesses of such life are also re-networked and detoured through Icke's narrative so that oppositional motifs remain real, vital, and prominent.

Capitalist spectacle is, therefore, both an integral aspect of Icke's successful postmodern aesthetic and its ultimate demise, as he mixes fresh approaches to political and cultural critique with baroque indulgence in occult history, less than rigorous critique of a consumer/normalized society, and spiritual mysticism. As such, Icke's utopia is at once unleashed and encaged by the global capitalist spectacle that is his object of analysis. While we believe that his work must be read as an attempt at a radical symbolic intervention into the checks made by hegemonic power, we also find that Icke's alien conspiracy theory reveals—in Jameson's words—the inevitable "miring of our imaginations in the mode of production itself, the mud of the present age in which the winged Utopian shoes stick" (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 75). In other words, Icke's utopian desires should not be considered as being ideologically neutral, his yearnings are ultimately ambivalent. Even as Icke promotes the sort of cosmic multi-dimensionality that he believes prefigures an experience of the Absolute, he serves to expose the very limitations of our own utopian imaginations to represent radical alternative subjectivities outside of ideologically inscribed conventions.

Identity Implosions: Alien/Human/Reptilian Hybridity

> Man is an enigma to himself . . . The possibility of comparison and hence of self-knowledge would arise only if he could establish relations with quasi-human mammals inhabiting other stars.
>
> Carl G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*

Research involving contemporary representations of alien/human/animal hybridity is related to large-scale changes being affected by new technologies and capital—post-World War II technocapital—and are part of a growing transdisciplinary scholarship concerned with what has come to be called "posthumanism" (Best and Kellner 149–200). Such literature points in two directions: historically, towards the analysis of a past discourse of primarily Western humanism, and, imaginatively, towards a reconstructed future in which the oppositions and hierarchies that characterize such humanism are overcome in either a utopian or dystopian manner. There has been a bevy of writing that problematizes the hallmark of Western humanism—an anthropocentric liberal subjectivity—by demonstrating the variety of ways in which it is predicated upon the dichotomous notion of self and imaginary other (Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* 117–27), culture and nature (Horkheimer and Adorno), and human and animal (Noske; Bleakley). While some science fiction writers like William Gibson represent the absolute abolition of nature and the animal, reducing them to the binary zeros of a technocultural hallucination, other SF writers from H G. Wells (Best and Kellner 164–71) to Octavia Butler (Sands; Stillman) have centered the dystopic threat represented by the alien figure of non-anthropocentric human/animal hybrids. As a sort of allegory for immediate political concerns like the explosion of biotechnology as a primary future economic direction for world markets, dystopic SF hybridity symbolizes that new technologically produced life forms in lab test-tubes destabilize traditional notions about humanity through their transgression of boundaries. Furthermore, such narratives challenge existing animal communities and the ecosystems that support them in a rather violent and unsolicited manner. By contrast, theorists like Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari celebrate the possible utopian dimensions of undermining what Jacques Derrida has called the liberal subject of "carnophallogocentrism" (112). In this respect, Haraway has called for the "significant otherness" of companion species (*Companion Species Manifest* 6–7), a defense of the free-play of biological difference in the prehensile lives of living beings. Likewise Deleuze and Guattari have called for the politics of a "becoming-animal," in which a new aesthetics of multiplicity and the ecology of difference is practiced and in which the history of humanism's hierarchical and self-

valorizing theory of evolution must give way to a theory of creative "involution" (*Thousand* 233–39).

The iconic drama of the reptoid versus human battle for the fate of the planet in the work of David Icke speaks directly to these critiques of the liberal humanist tradition, though we want to argue that it does so ambiguously, containing both positive and negative elements of signification. In his figure of the Aryan/reptoid nobility, Icke conjures an image of the alien/human/animal hybrid as the ultimate representation of modern evil—global leaders are lizards, then, in the same manner that Dr. Jekyll's madness for power resulted in his being revealed as the "hardly human" and "troglodytic" quasi-animal named Mr. Hyde (Skal 68–69). In combination with this image, Icke further describes the enslaved rest of humanity as a passive "herd" of "sheeple," or sheep people (*Alice* 13–17). In this respect, Icke's portrayal of the carnivorous alien lizards, who rule cruelly and mightily over a kingdom of domesticated human-sheep, is both complex and contradictory in its over-coding and universal application of the animal image to denote the radical difference of a fourth-dimensional species of space colonialists. As with similar science fiction narratives like *The Planet of the Apes*, Icke's theory utilizes the textual device of critical (Kumar), or cognitive (Suvin), estrangement, in which the image of the alien-animal-other serves to create the necessary distance by which we can criticize and examine current human norms *vis-à-vis* their relationship to Otherness generally. In this sense the representation of the reptoid could be considered progressive, as it associates evil with contemporaneous notions of fascism, imperialism, assimilative capitalism, hierarchy, war, and carnivorousness. Yet the castigation of these human all-too-human behaviors comes at the expense of the vilification of reptiles (and other animals), and so the animal image in Icke becomes an icon upon which human vice can be projected and so sacrificed and cleansed.[9] Additionally, in a similar manner, Icke decries the defining image of herbivorous and pastoral animals, which serves here to represent under realized human potentials (*Alice* 14–15). The representation of the animal in Icke's work, then, becomes an ambiguous code that represents human over (and under) development on all sides. Lacking any possibility of a positive valorization in and for itself, the image of the animal serves only to underwrite a critical, but ultimately heroic, narrative about

distinctively human possibilities and futures. In other words, Icke's use of animal symbolism to describe various states of human evolution is merely an anthropomorphized imaginative turn upon which human foibles and fears are projected onto the UFOther, which acts as a phantasmatic screen for human desires.

His call for a holistic conception of unlimited cosmic Otherness based on the unlocked potentials of human love also seems too anthropocentric. As such Icke appears to move in the utopian tradition of other theorists of universal love like Charles Fourier, who thought that cosmic harmony would necessitate the development of a new relationship between humans and nature such that novel animalities would arise. However, where Fourier imagined the possible existence of "antilions," "antisharks," and "antiseals" that would be friendly to humanity, he didn't imagine a correlative problem with the astronomer Lalande's "peculiar desire to eat live spiders" in the new amorous world (Geoghegan 20–21). This need to negate an image of radical animal differences—while simply expanding human liberty —speaks to the implicit inequalities of such a vision, and we believe a similar mistake occurs in the work of David Icke.

Through his decisively anthropocentric projections, a deep anxiety is revealed in Icke's writing concerning the unknowable and unsymbolizable UFOtherness, signified by the figure of the reptoid. Icke's reptoid is ultimately a reactionary and conservative icon, one not allowing for the free-play of differences, and its seems to represent a future characterized by the "fifth discontinuity" (Best and Kellner 164–65), in which a superior species enslaves and perhaps destroys humanity. Hence, the reptoid can be read as an emblem of dystopian warning about limit transgression, and while the Ickean universe is one in which hybridity reigns, his final message ironically appears to be a caveat about courting Otherness unabashedly. While superficially embracing the rhetoric of love as a unifying strong force, which crosses species and other boundaries, Icke is reluctant to truly engage the radical ambiguity posed by difference on its own terms. Thus, the reptoid, as the figure of irreducible UFOtherness outside our decisively human symbolic order, is conveniently domesticated in the end. A real ethic of reptoid difference would have to face the terrifying possibility that a close encounter with alien love—if we can even call it such—may disgust, baffle,

or horrify our human sensibilities. Interestingly, UFO folklorist Thomas Bullard notes that such a conception is presently gaining favor amongst UFO abductees, who are advancing a notion of "The Change": a "time when hybrids and normal humans coexist in a world of extraordinary beauty. Yet this coexistence will be altogether on alien terms. Their paradise is a soulless alien realm that snuffs out the uniqueness of humanity and leaves little hope that we can avert its coming" (182).

Therefore, Icke's final utopian call to love the reptoid-within does not go far enough, though against Bullard's abductees we would assert that they in fact go *too far* still. The reptoid-within must be allowed to transform or, as the case may be, mutate the very parameters of love as such, otherwise the reptoid becomes a trained alter-ego that crushes the transgressive and revolutionary power in seeking new hybrid horizons in the first place. And yet, such becomings are a central part of the human domain and society-at-large as well, and so we believe that hybridic icons like the reptoid should ultimately serve to suggest how a critical and emancipatory posthumanism reconstructs the future interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the difference symbolized by the UFOther in an egalitarian and non-totalizing manner. While Icke approaches this plateau, he ultimately regresses back to a much more anthropocentric perspective that negates his own utopian turn.

There is a greater dilemma in Icke's corpus than a latent anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism, however: capitalism—a dilemma which seems also to typify many other utopian movements like animal rights or postmodern identity politics in their attempts to reconstruct less oppressive social relations between groups. As we argued earlier, utopianism today simply must confront the growing reality of transnational capitalism, and we find Icke's utopian holism limited in its ability to recognize the manner in which it may inform or be informed by capitalist logic and technique. To the degree that Icke's Reptoid Hypothesis can be read positively as a clarion call to reconfigure new hybrid selves that implode traditional dualistic hierarchies like human/animal, human/alien, and self/other, we find that the lack of a sufficient theory of capitalism in his work may only serve to lead practitioners down the commodified road of New Age neo-shamanism (Noel). Further, while Icke's notion concerning the infinite multiplicities of being contains kernels of revolutionary potential,

such as is found in Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-animal," we want to argue here that these kinds of superstructural shiftings in and of themselves can in fact be the very fuel that feeds the voracious appetite of present-day capitalism. As Slovoj Zizek contends, global capital constitutes a variety of systems "which clearly favor the mode of subjectivity characterized by the multiple shifting identifications" (*Specter* 25). From Zizek's perspective, a theorist such as Icke can only "overestimate the subversive potential of disturbing the functioning of the big Other" through symbolic tactics (*Ticklish Subject* 264). Thus, as we have shown, Icke's own utopian vision of an alternative trans-dimensionality is itself sustained by the monocultural transnational capitalism which functions as its disavowed anchoring point. To this end, Icke himself is at his worst when he interprets his notion of the infinite "I" in a humanist direction of liberal anthropocentrism (*Alice* 483). By doing so, he thereby undermines the radical impact and political efficacy of his liberatory vision by reducing the brutalities of human-induced oppression to a mere game of the consumer self. As Icke states, "It's just a game. It's just a ride" (*Children* 427). Such statements wrongly serve to depoliticize the noxious material realities that by and large comprise the domination and exploitation of humans, animals, and difference in general that Icke himself sets as the task to document, explain, and overcome.

Conclusion: Reptoids of the World Unite?

> Irresistible and bittersweet that loosener of limbs,
> Love reptile-like strikes me down.
> Sappho in Barnard, *Sappho*

David Icke's project is two-fold: to provide a searching and devastating critique of the mainstream and then to offer an alternative, love, as a positive vision which might replace that which he has previously annulled. In this way, Icke's work can be said to be dialectical, and the idea of a transcendent love that overcomes the fragmentation and inequity of the reality that he calls "the five sense prison" (*Alice* 462) is offered as the ultimate sublation of the emerging global fascist state, which he outlines. For Icke, the process of personal awakening unfolds, then, as follows: fascism negated by nihilistic

paranoia which is then doubly negated by the personal awareness of what the Upanishads refer to as "*Tat tvam asi*"—"Thou art That" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The love which Icke speaks of then extends beyond any single signification and so would assert itself at a higher level than other conceptions such as *eros*, *agape*, or *charitos*. Rather, Icke's love is akin to contemporary spiritual conceptions that stress the actualization of holistic states of consciousness which transgress everyday awareness, and which incorporate an invigorated spirituality that accords with so-called Perennial Philosophy (Grof). In a manner that much resembles Icke's thinking, the famed ufologist Jacques Vallee has also remarked upon how states of non-ordinary consciousness may be connected to experiences of alien conspiracy:

> I am going to be very disappointed if UFOs turn out to be nothing more than visitors from another planet. . . . I think the UFO phenomena [sic] is teaching us that we do not understand time and space. . . . At this level, it does not matter whether or not UFOs are real. If people believe that something is real, then it is real in its effects. . . . Could the UFO phenomenon be manipulating us? Could it be a teaching system of some sort? Perhaps something that we are creating ourselves. . . . Or, could it be manipulated purposely by people who have the technology to simulate UFO sightings? . . There is another way of thinking about this. We are at a time of crisis on earth. We have the means of destroying the planet, which we have never had before in human history. It may be that there is a collective unconscious. Perhaps we are creating the visions we need to survive, in order to transcend the crisis. Perhaps there are no UFOs in a manufactured sense. (qtd. in Mishlove 184)

More recently, John Mack, the Harvard psychiatrist vilified for his positive studies of UFO abductee experiences, has spoken of the need to transcend "the dualistic mind" that erupts in self/other relations that

underlie warfare and terrorism. Conclusions such as the following accord perfectly with the utopian agenda outlined by Icke:

> Humanity seems to be at a turning point. We are experiencing a kind of race to the future between the forces of destruction and creation. The preservation of our lives and possibilities will come not from the strategies of terrorists, nor from the bombs of the self-righteous. This can happen only through a great awakening, a worldwide shift in consciousness that can transcend the habits of dualism, and enable the citizens of the Earth to become a genuine family of people and peoples, in which each of us can come to feel a responsibility for the welfare of all. As Gandhi once said, "We must *be* the change." (Mack 17).

But, as is the fate of all attempts to represent the unrepresentable and imagine radical difference—radical Otherness is, by definition, not our idea of it (Badiou 18–23)—such utopian visions ultimately collapse back upon themselves, stagnating under the invisible tractor beam of contemporary ideological conventions. As we have shown, Icke's alien conspiracy theory is too closely linked with capitalist media spectacle and the anthropocentric, liberal-humanist tradition that has served as its foundation throughout modern times. In part, this link leads Icke to mistakenly project onto the real culprits of world-wide murder campaigns—armed neoconservative extremists like George W. Bush—the image of the animal, which is more properly the image of global fascism's victim (Sax, Patterson). While it might be argued that in calling for a redeemed version of "love thy enemy" Icke presents an allegory that promotes a necessary and renewed embrace of animality and Otherness—one that would likewise serve as a solution for global crises -Icke's stereotypical images of the animal as unreasonable, emotionless beyond fear, and concerned only with basic survival instincts serve as reactionary themes within his work. Indeed, upon reading his voluminous alien conspiracy theory as an allegory, one senses that the reptoid serves at the level of narrative as little more than a foil for a romance about the potential heroism dormant in today's humanity—the

larger community of liberal subjects. But this use of the reptoid is actually a conservative streak that runs as an undercurrent beneath Icke's tapestry of cultish excess, and as such it is wrong. George W. Bush deserves to be criticized, but not because he is either nonhuman or inhumane. Rather, a more exact critique would focus on Bush's militarism, his status as the ultimate liberal subject, and the disastrous results of his brutal imperial ethics upon the nonhuman world and the over three billion oppressed people that Western speciesism codes as "animal" (Derrida 112; Wolfe 7–8). Thus, Icke's notion of multi-dimensional subjectivity is ultimately a concept that lacks an adequate representation, and his politics of visionary love stands in requirement of a more thoroughly articulated materialist praxis. Whereas a critical theorist such as Douglas Kellner ends his analysis of the conspiracy surrounding 9/11 with a lengthy *J'accuse* of the entire Bush administration (*From 9/11 to Terror War* 255–59), for all his spiritual and mystical insight David Icke is left rather embarrassingly in the opposite political register: "I love you George Bush, father and son; I love you Cheney and Powell and Kissinger and Carlucci and the Illuminati High Council and the reptilian hierarchy in the inter-space plane. I love you. If I don't love you I don't love myself" (*Alice* 486).

In light of this paradox, perhaps it is appropriate to end this essay with our own clarion call for a new exo-revolution that re-incorporates—as part of a larger whole—Icke's reptoid ethos into the ongoing struggle against the forces of global capitalism and imperialism. We are unwilling to give up on the utopian aspects of Icke's postmodern imagination. Icke has tapped into the utopian longings of the masses in a potentially liberatory way. Right-wing fanatics,[10] leftist conspiracy buffs, New Agers, college students, and an increasingly dissatisfied and questioning public the world over have found something deeply provocative in Icke that cannot simply be explained away as manifestations of a collective false-consciousness, clinical paranoia, or, as Freud would say, group hypnosis. Icke's politics are more complex than such characterizations, as is his contradictory relationship with capitalism and media spectacle. It is our conclusion that theories such as Icke's can be utilized to point us in a direction in which the postmodern imagination envisions new co-constructed coalitions between humans and animals, and between culture and nature—these coalitions nurturing the creation of a

world-wide ecotopia, where new subjectivities could blossom like exotic rainforest fauna. With recent reports of ever-increasing rain forest destruction—this despite over two decades of global concern and education, including the direct intervention of numerous nation states, NGOs, and other organizations—the idea that the future hopes for existing endangered flora and fauna may in fact depend on our ability to generate a global paradigm shift in how humanity thinks and acts in relation to its terrestrial family seems less and less mystical indeed (Reuters).

In this respect, Icke's call to awaken to the greater cosmic significance of love and the interconnectedness of all things—with his implied insistence that the non-awakened shall be committed to the spectral Hades of a growing military-industrial complex purgatory framed by dire poverty and extinction of hell, on the one hand, and the Hollywood Hills of heaven, on the other—strikes us as the right message for this time. Icke's sense that we must dream the impossible dream and actualize it in our everyday lives is sound wisdom in an age when individuals and localities are threatened and controlled by the expanding global forces of terror, domination, and destruction. As transnational capitalism violently transforms the world in opposition to ecologies of place, the world stands in need of a massive transformation in a counter-direction. Icke's notion that such transformation may be effected through the emblem of transgression, in which we signify our commitment both to the locality we inhabit and to the larger community of life through the invention and deployment of new counter aesthetics, represents a sort of utopia that moves beyond the merely fanciful, and it is exactly this sort of thinking and practice that is unfortunately missing within much of the presently more secular and materialist-oriented anti-war and anti-globalization scene.

Endnotes

[1] The authors want to thank Peter McLaren for the genesis of the idea of providing a critical investigation into the revolutionary potential of David Icke, and for his friendship, encouragement, and ongoing support of this project.

[2] Nuwaubians are a group that mixes the politics of afrocentric black nationalism with ideas about the alien origin of humanity and an eschatological return of alien civilization. Posadists are followers of the once leading Latin American Trotskyite, Juan Posadas, who equate post-revolutionary society with a Socialism brought to earth from what they believe is an alien future. Raëlians recently grabbed headlines by claiming to be the first to successfully clone human beings (in fact their organization Clonaid claimed two!), but while the movement believes in the humane and progressive use of science and technology to live in accordance with the alien powers that are its true origins, Raëlians additionally believe in sensualism and other doctrines that give this group a unique agenda with wide popular appeal. We use "New Age" loosely here as a signifier that points to a general class of post-1960s literature and the spiritually-minded people who have made a culture around it.

[3] The prefix "exo-" denotes a state of being beyond, or not of, the Earth. Thus, theorizing about alien practices is the study of an exoculture, and our work here is in part exocultural studies.

[4] Some utopias may in fact be fictive narratives about "no place" or projects that lay out plans and laws for a perfect world, but we do not take that up here and it would be a mistake to associate either David Icke or our own work with these traditions.

[5] For a much more detailed description, refer to David Icke's *The Biggest Secret* and *Children of the Matrix*.

[6] This theory is an example of how Icke combines various narrative strains under one signification, theorizing that the Anunnaki come from the Draco star system, with connotations, therefore, of dragon, draconian law, and Count Dracula. As this article will later explore, the signification of Dracula is itself choice as vampires themselves are historically associated with a variety of malignant human/animal cross-breedings.

[7] Before becoming a full time alien conspiracy expert, Icke had served as a UK Green party spokesperson.

[8] For instance, Icke's own name tends to outsize and dominate even his own book titles and conference fliers, sending the message that it is the star-status of his personality that is ultimately being sold more than the infotainment he provides—which is wholly in line with the logic of

Hollywood spectacle and is a marketing technique often used by the movie-trailer industry to generate audience share.

[9] In his work, Icke also makes much use of the analysis of the negative imagery of the owl, which he describes as a Freemasonic emblem signifying a relationship to Babylonian Aryan/reptoid cults. In contrast, along with UFO groups that posit that alien dolphinoids have arrived on earth in order to save humanity, Icke commonly uses the representation of the dolphin as signifying cosmic peace and justice.

[10] It should be pointed out that in his most recent work Icke critiques the Christian- and far-right, thereby distancing himself from that association.

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